



Ranking Republican, Senate Agriculture and Rural Economic Development Committee

**April 21, 2009**

Dear Neighbors,

In my first *Ag Alert!* of this year I predicted the 2009 session would be one of the most challenging in my 17 sessions as a legislator. Here on day 100 of our scheduled 105-day session I stand by that.

State government's budget situation has overshadowed everything else this session. I'll share more about that in my next report because no one – especially those of us in the legislative minority, even though I serve on the Senate Ways and Means Committee – knows exactly what the budget for 2009-11 will contain.

However, we already know the majority party, having missed opportunities to save billions of dollars and mismanaged prior budgets, is proposing a sales tax increase to prevent cuts in health care services for the needy (this while allowing many state employees to get “step” increases in salary). That makes it difficult for me to be optimistic about the ag-related tax relief proposals which are still alive.

Perhaps the best news so far budget-wise is the commitment by Washington State University leaders to preserving WSU Extension (which means 4-H and other programs) to the extent possible, while having to make other administrative cuts because funding for higher education will be reduced significantly.

Beyond the budget a few other large policy questions which stand to affect Washington employers are still hanging, having to do with unemployment insurance; the “family medical leave” proposal; and the “cap-and-tax” proposal related to climate change. Again, I don't expect to know those answers until after the Legislature adjourns for the year this Sunday (presuming we don't go into “overtime” with a special session).

For now, here's a rundown of ag-related actions from the session:

New state agriculture director: It's tough to beat the combination of farmer and lawmaker when looking for someone to lead the state Department of Agriculture. Some probably wondered why Dan Newhouse, a veteran member of the House Republican Caucus, would leave to work for a Democrat governor, but I know Dan's decision to accept the offer was made with the best interests of

Washington agriculture in mind. Dan is a class act and will serve the people of our state well; I was glad to vote in the Senate to confirm his appointment.

Wheat and barley commissions unite: At the request of their leaders I introduced [Senate Bill 5076](#) to combine the wheat and barley commissions into a new Washington Grain Commission. Wheat and barley growers assess themselves millions of dollars to pay for marketing and other activities; the merger will save them money through economy of scale and result in a small savings for taxpayers as well, because the Department of Agriculture will have one less commission to oversee.

The Senate passed my bill, and the House passed [Substitute House Bill 1254](#), the identically worded “companion” bill introduced by my Ninth District seatmate, Rep. Joe

Schmick. The Senate voted on Rep. Schmick’s bill before the House got around to voting on my legislation, so it was the House version which the governor signed into law April 9 (the new law takes effect July 26). That’s fine with me, because the ultimate goal still is achieved.



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The new commission is composed of five wheat producer members, two barley producer members, two members representing the wheat industry, one member representing the barley industry, and an appointee of the WSDA. The jurisdiction of the commission is broken into five districts for wheat and seven for barley.

Control of *Rhagoletis pomonella* (apple maggot): My legislation ([Senate Bill 5765](#)) makes \$150,000 from the industry-funded fruit and vegetable inspection account available this summer to Yakima-area local horticultural pest and



disease boards to control apple maggot infestations. We need to be able to certify to worldwide buyers of Washington apples that our apples are pest-free, so I view this bill as a cost-effective insurance policy. It passed the Legislature unanimously and was sent on to the governor Saturday.

Ag legislation roundup: I and my colleagues on the Senate Agriculture and Rural Economic Development Committee gave a “do pass” recommendation to 31 bills prior to the March 30 cutoff for committee action.

Take away the handful that are about rural economic development and the agricultural measures which are budget-related and still hanging this week (such

as tax exemptions for livestock manure management and the non-highway use of propane), and here's the status of the rest:

*Not passed by one or both legislative chambers before cutoff (and most likely "dead" until next session):*

- Washington heritage livestock and poultry breed recognition program ([Senate Bill 5002](#));
- mobile custom farm slaughtering unit loan program ([SB 5004](#));
- program to certify and market certain cattle from Washington as either "natural beef cattle" or "natural grass-fed beef cattle" ([SB 5005](#));
- milk products for animal food consumption ([SB 5678](#));
- milk pricing task force ([SB 6092](#));
- special assessments for conservation districts ([SB 5086](#)); and
- current use/open space ([House Bill 1815](#));

*Passed Legislature, delivered to governor:*

- Protecting landowners' investments in Christmas trees ([House Bill 1137](#));
- annexing areas used for agricultural fairs ([HB 1295](#));
- dairy nutrient management program ([Senate Bill 5677](#));
- civil infraction to knowingly transport "downer" cows to feedlots and slaughter facilities ([SB 5974](#));
- exempting anaerobic digesters from solid waste permitting ([SB 5797](#)); and
- my bill on administration of irrigation districts ([SB 5839](#))

*Signed into law:*

- Membership on horticultural pest and disease boards ([House Bill 1682](#); I had introduced an identically worded Senate version);
- regarding dispensing and administration of drugs to registered or licensed veterinary personnel ([HB 1271](#));
- changing special permit provisions for poultry slaughter, preparation, and care ([Senate Bill 5350](#));
- my bill regarding the operation and authority of the state conservation commission ([SB 5437](#)).



*As a proud former member of Future Farmers of America I'm always glad to see FFA members. Alex Liebelt (president), Sierra Appling (reporter), Adam Corum (student teacher) and Mike Wallace (advisor) from Quincy were kind enough to visit me in Olympia recently.*

**On the calendar:**

**May**

Wednesday, May 6 – Washington Cattlemen's Association Policy Update, Wild Horse Wind Farm, 25901 Vantage Highway, Ellensburg (contact: Jack Field at 509-929-1711)

Wednesday, May 27 – Columbia County Conservation Tour, Dayton, starting at 8:30 a.m. (contact: Paul Carter at 509-382-4741)

**June**

Thursday, June 18 – Lind Field Day, Lind, starting at 8:30 a.m. w/noon lunch (contact Bill Schillinger, 509-235-1933)

Wednesday-Thursday, June 24-25 – Washington Association of Wheat Growers legislative tour, Walla Walla (contact Heather Hansen at 360-705-2040 or [heatherhh@qwestoffice.net](mailto:heatherhh@qwestoffice.net))

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